Título: Laughing Matters: Comic Tradition In India

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"How can anyone laugh who knows of old age, disease, and death?"_Buddhacarita

This question, so solemnly posed by the young Buddha, first led Lee Siegel to examine the hitherto unexplored realm of Indian comedy. Laughing Matters is Siegel's account of two intersecting journeys: a search for comic traditions created and preserved in Sanskrit literature and a journey through modern India in quest of a laughter that persists across time and culture.

Hearing a boisterous and bawdy voice from India's past, Siegel has provided original and highly entertaining translations of Sanskrit literature that reveal a sparkling sensibility embedded in the texts. These translations are integrated with a detailed analysis of the types and structures of India's mirth. Siegel develops an original theory of comedy and laughter, applying it to reveal the humor in the ancient works. Defining sacred and profane comedy and the "taste" and "erotics" of laughter, he delineates two main Indian categories of comedy_laughter at others and laughter at oneself_which are roughly parallel to the Western traditions of satire and humor. He examines these categories in all of their forms and functions: satires of manners, social satire, and religious satire; and human and divine comedy. Siegel concludes by presenting his perceptions of humor in modern India as seen through cartoons, movies, books, and social gatherings.

Laughing Matters is both a serious and a hilarious study of the Indian comic sense of life_a vision formed in the convergence of the bitter insight of satire and the sweet outlook of humor. Past and present, the contextual and the universal, scholarship and the picaresque, are all interwoven in this original treatise on the aesthetics of comedy and the psychology of laughter.